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Basic Factors and Main Tendencies in  
Current Soviet Policy

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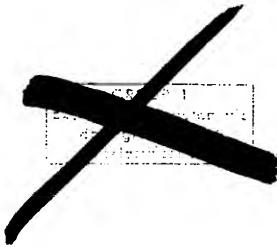
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## BASIC FACTORS AND MAIN TENDENCIES IN CURRENT SOVIET POLICY

### NOTE

This paper considers in broad perspective the principal factors which underlie the USSR's external policies at present and its aims and intentions with respect to certain key areas and issues. As such, while it suggests the limits within which Soviet policies are likely to operate, it does not estimate likely Soviet conduct and positions in detail. In view of the intimate interaction between Soviet and American policies, this could not be done in any case without specific assumptions about American policy and actions.

### PRINCIPAL OBSERVATIONS

A. Ideology in the Soviet Union is in a certain sense dead, yet it still plays a vital role. This paradox explains much about the nature of Soviet society and the USSR as a world power today. While the regime's doctrines now inhibit rather than promote needed change in the system, the leaders continue to guard them as an essential support to their rule. They also view developments at home and abroad mainly within the conceptual framework of the traditional ideology. This fact will continue to limit the possibilities of Soviet-American dialogue.

B. Changes in the system and the society have probably made collective leadership of the Party Politburo less vulnerable to new attempts to establish a personal dictatorship. This seems particularly true so long as the men who now comprise the leadership remain. Nevertheless, a crisis within the present leadership, accompanied by high domestic tensions and greater unpredictability of external policy, could occur at any time without warning. If stability of the leadership continues, a relatively deliberate, bureaucratically compromised manner of decisionmaking will also continue.

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C. The Soviet leaders face severe problems at home. A decline in the rate of economic growth is tightening the perennial squeeze on resource allocation. Dissidence and alienation in the professional classes is of growing concern to the Soviet leaders. Generally speaking, however, they are not at this time constrained by domestic problems from continuing the general line of foreign policy they have followed in recent years.

D. The leadership believes that the USSR's net power position in the world, as affected by both military and political factors, has improved in the years since the Cuban missile crisis. But this is qualified by instability in its main security sphere in Eastern Europe and by increased strains in the Soviet economy and society. This appraisal by the Soviet leaders probably argues for continuing an external policy of cautious opportunism and limited pressures, perhaps with some increased watchfulness against the development of uncontrolled risks.

E. There is a tendency in Soviet foreign policy to give increased weight to geopolitical considerations as against the traditional conception Moscow has had of itself as the directing center of a world revolutionary movement. This is evident in the concentration of diplomatic and aid efforts in recent years on countries around the southern periphery of particular strategic interest to the USSR. It is seen also in the guidance given to most Communist parties to pursue moderate tactics, which are now more compatible with Soviet foreign policy interests.

F. Soviet aims to bring about a European settlement which would secure the USSR's hegemony in Eastern Europe, obtain the withdrawal of US forces, and isolate West Germany have suffered a severe setback because of the action taken to suppress Czechoslovakia's attempt to follow an independent course. For the present, the Soviets are unlikely to be responsive to any new Western initiatives to promote a European settlement, unless the West seems willing to contemplate recognition of the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe and of the division of Germany.

G. The Soviets have a double concern in the Middle East at present: to keep their risks under control and to do this in such a manner as to avoid diminishing the influence they have won with the Arab

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States. Should renewed hostilities occur, the USSR might be drawn into assisting the defense of the Arabs, but it would not want to run the political and military risks of joining in attacks on Israel or actually threatening its survival. At that stage, the Soviets would probably collaborate tacitly with the US to control the situation.

H. Beginning as an attempt to move into the vacuum left by the end of Western colonialism, Soviet policy in Asia in recent years has been geared increasingly to the containment of China. Nevertheless, the Soviets still act in particular situations, including Vietnam, basically on the premise that the Soviet-American relationship in Asia is competitive. The major risks which may eventually arise from the growth of Chinese power, however, may persuade them to move toward some tacit collaboration.

I. Though the inducements to reach a strategic arms limitation agreement with the US are probably stronger at this time than ever before, Moscow's policy-bureaucratic argument over this issue is not resolved. The Soviets probably hope that talks themselves, even if no agreement is reached, will ease the pressures of the arms race by slowing US decisions on new programs.

J. Even though the Soviet system appears ripe for change because it is now poorly suited to managing a complex industrial society, its rulers remain tenacious in defending their monopoly of power and acutely fearful of adaptive change. The wider involvement of the USSR in world affairs and possible shifts in world power relations may eventually generate stronger pressures for change. Short of this, the outlook is for chronic tensions in Soviet-American relations, perhaps caused more frequently by events over which neither side has much control.

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## DISCUSSION

### BASIC FACTORS UNDERLYING SOVIET POLICY

#### *Ideology*

1. Qualified observers are heard to say, "Ideology is dead in the USSR," while others equally qualified assert, "Ideology remains dominant in Soviet politics and policy." Taken literally, neither statement is valid. But understood as half-truths, both not only say something important about Soviet reality but are also compatible with each other. The paradox that ideology is in some sense dead but still plays a vital role explains much about the nature of the USSR as a society and as a world power today.

2. Marxism-Leninism is a dead ideology in the sense that it has become a calcified scripture, is seen as boring or irrelevant by most of the Soviet population, is cynically manipulated by the political elite, and inhibits rather than promotes needed social change in the USSR. It remains a major factor, however, because in the main it continues to provide the conceptual framework within which Soviet internal and external policies are formulated. It is the semantical prism through which the Soviet leaders view the problems and development of their own system. More important, it conditions profoundly the way in which they interpret the aims and conduct of non-Communist societies. With respect to the US, in particular, it underlies the fearful and hostile "set" of Soviet attitudes which so greatly limits the flexibility needed for resolving conflicts of interest.

3. Some observers have thought at various times that all this was changing, that doctrinal politics was giving way inevitably to pragmatic politics. Such opinions have proved premature. The basic and often overlooked reason is that ideology performs a vital political function in the Soviet system: it serves as the regime's badge of legitimacy. Without the claim that it was the embodiment of a historically predestined process of revolutionary social advance, all the crimes and deprivations which this regime has inflicted on a long-suffering people might not have been borne. Force alone, without buttressing from doctrinal rationalizations which claimed high moral purpose, probably would not have been enough to give the Soviet regime the authority it needed. From the beginning, moreover, ideological rigor has been used as a weapon to preserve the unity of a fractious Party and to suppress nonconforming elements inside and outside it. In Russian conditions and against the background of Russian history, ideology has proved to be an important tool in making effective the rule by force and repression of the small political sect which seized power in 1917 and has held it by tyrannical methods since.

4. Today the Soviet leadership remains as sensitive as ever to any hint of challenge to its ideological pretensions. In fact, during the last several years it has grown more rigid and conservative in this respect. The reasons for this are complex. They begin simply with the temperament of the bureaucratic col-

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lective which now governs. Then, social change has produced a larger educated class and in particular a technical elite which is less disposed to think ideologically or to accept ritualistic formulas of the old kind. Further, the ideological as well as political authority of the Soviet leadership has been sharply challenged by the nationalist-inspired deviations which have appeared in China and Eastern Europe since Stalin's death. Finally, the effort to isolate the population and also Party members from alien influences, on which the preservation of the regime's ideological authority depends, has grown more difficult; there has been increased exposure to the outside world in a number of ways, partly as a consequence of the development of communications.

5. The consequence is that the men who now govern the USSR feel themselves on the ideological defensive. They believe that if they retreat on this front the whole structure of their power will crumble. This concern lies behind their intensified repression of dissidents in recent years and their cautious restoration of Stalin's reputation; it figured strongly in their use of force against the Czechoslovak reform movement. Short of the appearance of new leadership, and possibly not then, this mood of fearful conservatism is unlikely to change. It will affect adversely the tone of Soviet-American relations and thus the possibilities of the more constructive dialogue which must be the prelude to any significant improvement in those relations.

#### *Stability and Stress in the Domestic System*

6. *The Leadership.* To the surprise of some students of the Soviet system, collective leadership—the sharing of power by a dozen or so top leaders in the Politburo, the Party's supreme executive organ—has endured since the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964. While collectivity has always been the declared principle on which the system was supposed to operate, the dictatorship of one man has been the rule during much of Soviet history. Some have concluded that the failure of Khrushchev to consolidate himself in such a role and the evident fact that Brezhnev, despite the prominence conferred by the title of General Secretary, does not have it now, means that the age of dictators has passed in the USSR.

7. Persuasive considerations argue for this view. The dynamics of other revolutions suggest that the heroic figures of the first generation give way to men of more limited capacity whose temper is more bureaucratic. The men who now comprise the top echelon, who have spent their entire lives in the apparatus, appear to be of this stripe. Moreover, the enormous growth of state and economic institutions, and the far greater complexity of the issues posed as Soviet society has developed, make the simplistic methods of an earlier time inapplicable. Collective, i.e., bureaucratic decisionmaking seems the normal mode in the USSR today.

8. Yet tensions arising from the attempt of individual leaders to enlarge their power are evident from time to time, and it cannot be doubted that the classic form of power struggle seen in the past persists behind the façade of collectivity.

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The system remains one of men and not of laws. Therefore, it is impossible to rule out new attempts by individual leaders to establish themselves in the role of dictator, together with the arbitrary measures, increased social tensions, and unpredictability of policy which would inevitably accompany such attempts. At a minimum, there will be leaders who will strive to establish ascendancy over their colleagues, and thus, as Khrushchev appeared likely to do for a time, to reduce collectivity in effect to a mere form.

9. If such developments were to occur, they would probably result from some major setback at home or abroad, from a deadlock over some vital issue of policy whose resolution was urgent, or simply from an accumulation of unsolved problems. A new personal dictatorship would require the emergence of some commanding personality clearly superior to his colleagues in the skills of the power game, though the appearance of a man of such dimensions is entirely a matter of chance. On the whole, while it is not at all implausible to believe that attempts to displace collective leadership will be made, it appears unlikely that such attempts will be successful in the conditions that now obtain in the political system and the society. This seems particularly true so long as the men who now comprise the leadership remain. .

10. A breakdown in the apparent stability of the present collective, even short of an attempt by one man to displace or dominate it, is always possible, however. The result might be a change in the composition of the leadership and a shift of direction on some major aspect of policy. It is impossible to say what circumstances might precipitate such a development or to predict the event itself. The principal members of the Politburo are old enough to be subject to sudden health hazards; sooner or later the need to coopt new members might unhinge the delicate balance of power within that group. Domestic issues which are always key ones and are now serious, combined with the kind of contentious problems now being encountered by Soviet policy abroad, most conspicuously the setback in Czechoslovakia, could bring a leadership crisis at any time.

11. This threat of instability overhanging the top leadership does not arise from a mere constitutional imbalance, like the weakness of the executive under the Fourth Republic in France, and the consequent instability of cabinets. It is due, despite the existence of a constitution on paper, to the disregard of constitutional restraints which could confer legitimacy on the system and its procedures. Thus the matter of succession to leadership has been on each occasion a struggle for raw power as in a gang. Similarly, the role of the Party in relation to society and its institutions, including government organs, is an arbitrary one, uncontrolled by law. The Party purports to be merely an instrument for political inspiration and guidance, but in fact Party men under direction from the top exercise a power of intervention at all levels and in every institution. The result is a sense throughout the society that power is wielded arbitrarily and unjustly. In this atmosphere, individuals withhold their voluntary cooperation and the ability of authority to deal efficiently with many problems is reduced.

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12. If the collective leadership continues without major ructions, policy and decisionmaking will be of the cautious and deliberate kind seen in recent years. This does not mean that decisions do not get made or that policy is wholly without initiative. It does mean that significant moves are likely to come under the pressure of events, and normally will be less sweeping or erratic than they were under Khrushchev, for example.

13. *Sources of Strain.* The problems facing the Soviet leadership at present are severe. One of the major ones is the perennial dilemma of all modern governments: how to allocate inadequate resources among the primary goals of policy—military strength and security, economic development and growth, consumption and welfare. The Soviet system continues to be able to apply proportionately greater resources to public purposes than non-Communist industrial states can. But it is trying to sustain a world power competition with the US on an economic base half that of the US. While this has been managed by reliance on a highly-centralized and inflexible command economy, the resulting strains are serious and have been increasing. In the USSR as elsewhere, decisions affecting the allocation of resources are made at the margin, and the margins have been narrowing.

14. Both a reflection and a source of increasing strain has been a decline in the economy's rate of growth. This decline was owing to a combination of factors: with growing technological complexity, growth rates per unit of investment have fallen off, particularly in industry; the resource drain of major military and space programs in this decade has been substantial; concessions to popular demands for material improvement, especially in food and housing, were thought necessary. The result has been a slow decline in the rate of growth of investment in industry. This, along with the drop in productivity of investment, has led to a significant decline in the rate of growth in industrial output.

15. The response of the Soviet leaders has been to introduce economic reforms aimed at raising the still low levels of productivity in industry and agriculture. The program laid down in 1965 and still being implemented seeks to do this by providing greater autonomy and incentives for enterprises. The measures were not only partial but were largely frustrated in practice and the gains so far have been insignificant. While much more radical departures, amounting in effect to a change in the nature of the system, would be necessary to get results, the resistance of the Party and the vast state bureaucracy precludes change of this magnitude. Moreover, the Soviet leaders fear, as was demonstrated most recently in Czechoslovakia, that moves to free the economy from central control give rise rapidly to demands for freedom in every aspect of society, including politics. This they seem less ready than ever to face, and so their economic dilemmas will remain and sharpen.

16. Social strains have led the leaders to give steady attention and increased resources to meeting expectations for an improved level of life, even at the cost of investment in other sectors traditionally of high priority. Thus a multiplicity

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of goals makes decisions harder, especially under collective leadership; perhaps there has also been some loss of will and ruthlessness on the part of the ruling elite. Yet the leadership does not appear to regard the material discontents of the masses as an actual threat, and it is probably right in this.

17. What it evidently does fear is the striking increase in recent years of manifestations of dissidence among intellectuals. It is easy enough to threaten and imprison a handful of activist writers and artists, and this is being done, but these brave few represent the leading edge of an alienation that is far broader, especially in the educated professional class. These people resent the frustration of hopes for greater freedom which arose in the decade after Stalin's death, they fear the neo-Stalinist tendencies which are evident, and they are contemptuous of the narrowness and mediocrity of the present leaders.

18. No one can say for sure what the scope of such alienation really is, but that it is wider, deeper, and less passive than formerly seems clear. What the regime fears is the erosion of respect for its authority among leading elements of the society which might, in certain unforeseeable circumstances, combine with and activate the chronic discontents of the masses to produce a genuine challenge. While no such challenge seems imminent, occupants of the Kremlin probably always remind themselves that in Russia anarchy has usually lurked close beneath the surface of tyranny. In any case, barring a change of leaders, the outlook is for a careful but steady repression of liberalizing forces, and a continuing effort to wall out external sources of infection.

19. A threat to the political leadership stemming from the military establishment is sometimes predicted by Western analysts. Clearly the military leaders do have larger influence on decisions, partly because the leadership is a collective. Their role has also increased because the resources given to defense since World War II have grown greatly, and because decisions affecting defense are now more technically complex. Even though some military leaders might try to influence the outcome of a leadership crisis, the increased bureaucratic weight the military now enjoy is unlikely to persuade them that they could replace the Party in running the country. Probably most military men believe that the attempt would nowadays involve grave risks to national security. Should the Party regime be seriously weakened or collapse, however, the military leadership probably would intervene, but in such circumstances they would be acting primarily out of concern for national security. Such a development now seems remote.

20. *Implications for External Policy.* As in other states, there is a linkage in the USSR between internal and external policies. Since preoccupation with the regime's security at home is high, risks abroad are normally weighed carefully. It is worth noting, however, that in the years of Khrushchev's real ascendancy (1957-1962), when internal tensions were reduced and confidence in the domestic outlook was generally rising, there was a tendency toward more assertiveness and risk-taking abroad, though this was obviously due also to Khrushchev's own temperament.

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21. The present leaders are evidently aware that successes on the international scene can help to ease internal stresses and that setbacks abroad are dangerous to them at home. While they are not inclined, therefore, to be adventurous in foreign policy, they have shown a will to advance opportunistically under conditions of controlled risk, with a preference for moving into vacuums rather than for direct confrontations. The exception to this generally deliberate approach is their own security zone in Eastern Europe where, as in Czechoslovakia last summer, after some hesitation, they finally moved with brutal assertiveness. This action was primarily defensive, however, and the leading motive for it was precisely a fear for the eventual security of the Soviet regime itself.

22. Generally speaking, the present leadership conducts its foreign policies in such a manner as to impose no special handicaps on itself internally, and the domestic problems described above do not now prevent it from doing abroad what it wants to do. Apart from occasional grumbling over foreign aid expenditures, which are not in fact very heavy, on the whole the policies which have brought greater Soviet influence abroad, for example in the Middle East and South Asia, are probably a plus for the regime. But whenever Soviet policies encounter setbacks, and especially if they appear to heighten risks of war, as in the Arab-Israeli conflict of June 1967, stresses on the home front are sharply increased. This is one of the major reasons for a foreign policy of limited risks.

*Soviet Perception of the Balance of Power*

23. Intense preoccupation with the balance of power—what they call “the relation of forces”—is characteristic of the Soviet leaders. This springs from Marxism-Leninism itself, which is a doctrine concerned primarily with the analysis of power relations in society and the techniques for manipulating them. It also reflects the long years of “encirclement” when the Soviet leaders constantly perceived external threats aimed at the very existence of their regime.

24. In calculating power relationships the Soviets weigh a variety of factors. They give great weight to military power, perhaps as much for its political-psychological effects, i.e., its support to political warfare, as for its direct utility. In measuring the strength of other states, they also attach great importance to economic trends, to the degree of internal unity or division, and to the capacities of leaders and their will to confront risks. They are sensitive to the ebb and flow of opinion in other countries, not for reasons of sentiment, but because it may register shifts of attitude toward power relations and can thus actually affect those relations.

25. Viewed in such terms, the Soviet leaders evidently feel that their position has improved since the low point of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Nevertheless, not everything has come up roses. They have substantially bettered their relative strength in strategic weapons, and have acquired conventional capabilities which, in certain areas beyond the Bloc periphery, would permit them to intervene in a limited way. But in strategic weapons the US is now moving to new generation systems which will demand further strenuous efforts—and added economic

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burdens—if the Soviets wish to keep pace. Meanwhile, the US has sustained improved rates of economic growth for some years as Soviet growth has declined, and visions of “overtaking and surpassing” have vanished, even from propaganda. On the positive side, the world influence of the US has suffered because of Vietnam, its alliances have been strained, and it has been wracked by internal discords at a time when Soviet influence and presence in Asia and the Middle East have grown. But then the USSR’s position in Eastern Europe has become more complicated, Czechoslovakia was a disaster in world opinion, the disarray in the Communist movement has deepened, and there have even been important setbacks to Soviet influence in the Third World, as in Indonesia and Ghana.

26. As the Soviet leaders look at the world scene today, they probably feel that they can allow themselves no more than a measured optimism, tinged with real concern for the long-term outlook in Eastern Europe and for the growing severity of their problems at home. This does not mean that the total relation of forces, as viewed from Moscow at present, results in a conclusion that the USSR is overextended and must retrench. On balance, it probably argues for continuing policies of cautious opportunism and limited pressures, perhaps with some increased watchfulness against the development of uncontrolled risks. The Soviet leaders feel able to assert, moreover, as they have for some years, that their relative power justifies their claim to a world role equal to that of the US.

## SOVIET POLICIES ON MAJOR CURRENT ISSUES

### *Some General Tendencies*

27. Despite what was said in the opening section of this paper about a retreat to ideological conservatism internally, the USSR’s foreign policy under the present leaders has been marked generally by a decline in ideological emphasis and by what appears to be a primary concern for geopolitical considerations, of the sort normal in any great power. This is seen most notably in the concentration of diplomatic and aid efforts on the USSR’s southern periphery and in the virtual abandonment of the appeals for revolutionary brotherhood which accompanied Soviet entry into the Third World in the 1950’s. A parallel shift has been discernible also in the Soviet approach to Europe, and even intermittently in a more business-like if still harsh tone in dealings with the US.

28. Whatever Soviet rhetoric may still say, Moscow tends to act more like a world power than like the center of the world revolution. This has come about less by choice than by inadvertance and necessity. Possessed of global military strength in the nuclear age, the Soviet leaders wish the USSR to be recognized as a responsible global power. They have come to understand that under modern conditions even their security may rest partly on their ability to influence rather than to overthrow non-Communist governments. Compared with the 1950’s, the outlook for Communist revolutionary advance in the world as a whole seems far more complicated and much less promising. Finally, the transformation of

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China from ideological ally to great power enemy has evidently had a profound effect on the USSR's view of the world and thus on its policies.

29. The effort to preserve Moscow's leadership of the International Communist Movement goes on, but the motives have changed. Now this is desired primarily to preserve the Soviet security sphere in Eastern Europe and the party's domination at home, to counter Chinese action against Soviet interests everywhere, and to insure that Communist parties around the world serve rather than prejudice Soviet great power interests. The Soviet leaders may still believe that they are moving on the traditional double track—a state policy and a revolutionary policy—but their advice to Communist parties everywhere to moderate revolutionary tactics suggests otherwise.

30. One consequence of the more geopolitical emphasis in Soviet policy is the assignment of lesser priority to some areas. Latin America and Africa seem to be so regarded at present. Soviet diplomacy and propaganda are active and opportunities are taken in these areas, especially for trade and arms sales, but efforts and expectations are clearly reduced from what they were at the beginning of the 1960's. The troubled relationship with "socialist" Cuba and several disappointments in Africa and Asia have presumably brought about this change. Castro is probably carried today as a somewhat painful legacy of a more innocent phase, before the Soviets discovered their error in coopting as reliable Communists the often vigorous but "ideologically weak" revolutionaries they encounter in less developed countries.

31. The tendencies described here do not mean that the USSR is no longer a thrusting and ambitious power concerned to enlarge its world position. They do suggest that in practice the Soviets place somewhat less emphasis on their pretensions to be a revolutionary power with a universal mission. They are inclined to set priorities for their efforts in various areas in accordance with a more traditional view of Russian security interests and also with a more realistic view of the possibilities for expanding their influence. This does not ease US problems in coping with Soviet power; it may in some ways make the USSR a more formidable opponent. And, because the Soviet leaders are committed to a basically forward policy and have shown that they sometimes fail to appraise risks accurately, the possibility of crisis by miscalculation remains.

*The Enduring Confrontation in Central Europe*

32. However active they have been in other areas in recent years, the Soviets have always been clear that their security and their aspirations to a world role rest in the first instance on their position in Europe. This is based on holding Eastern Europe as an ideological and security buffer, and they have worked doggedly to consolidate, and to get international recognition for their hegemony there. With that went the long campaign to win final acceptance from the Western Powers of the division of Germany and the persistent effort to isolate and contain the Federal Republic, the revival of whose economic and political influence, the Soviets believe, would undermine their control of Eastern Europe.

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That nothing in this basic pattern has changed is shown clearly by their action in Czechoslovakia last summer.

33. A more forward kind of Soviet diplomacy in Europe, which gave a clue to long-range Soviet hopes for the area, had emerged in 1966-1967. Taking advantage of US involvement in Vietnam and the consequent strains in US relations with Europe, of De Gaulle's withdrawal from NATO, and of desires for detente in Western Europe, the Soviets tried to promote moves toward a European settlement without the US. At the time, they probably had in mind no more than a preliminary probe to stimulate West European interest in such an approach. But the outcome they look for eventually was made clear: dissolution of NATO and withdrawal of US forces, recognition of the status quo in Eastern Europe and in Germany, bilateral understandings between the USSR and Western European states which would in effect neutralize them, and general European support for the political isolation of West Germany. Fragmentation, not unity, in Europe is what the Soviets think serves their interests.

34. Czechoslovakia has buried such Soviet hopes, probably indefinitely, for what Moscow faces now is tantamount to a general crisis in its Eastern European sphere. Even if the Czechoslovaks are finally brought to heel and a responsive regime is restored, deep fissures in the Bloc system will remain. Nationalist frustration, resentment of economic dependence and stagnation, desire for renewed contact with the West will continue to plague all these regimes in one degree or another; serious instability is possible in several. Within their present premises, which include fear of radical change in Eastern Europe because it may generate pressures for the same in the USSR, the Soviets have no lasting solution. Sooner or later, they may be driven to use force again.

35. Against this background, the USSR is not likely for the present to be very responsive to new Western initiatives for a European settlement, whether these involve regional arms control, new security arrangements, or a revised approach to the German problem. Of course, if the West seemed willing to contemplate recognition of the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe and of the division of Germany, the Soviet attitude would be different. But assuming that the West would not abandon the principle of eventual self-determination in Germany in some form, and that the tendency of its proposals would be to promote freer East-West contacts in Europe, the Soviets would see only danger in them. In fact, such proposals might contribute to prolonging the USSR's present embarrassment over its relations with Eastern Europe.

#### *The Middle East*

36. When the Soviets, with their arms sales to Egypt in 1955, moved into the vacuum left in the Middle East by the collapse of the Western colonial system, they almost certainly did not anticipate the kind of situation in which they are now so heavily involved. Their aims were to diminish the Western presence, to increase strains in the Western Alliance, and ultimately to establish themselves as the pre-eminent power in the region. They hoped to do these things

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by developing the natural alliance they saw between themselves and "the progressive forces of national liberation," which they also imagined could be led under Soviet influence to take the "socialist road." They had no very profound understanding of the forces at work in the Arab world, nor of the depth of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Their opportunism in this case did win them great influence and a military presence in an area they clearly regard as of strategic importance to them, but it has also brought risks and burdens.

37. In the immediate situation in the Middle East, the USSR has a double concern: to contain risks and at the same time to avoid any undue prejudice to its influence with the Arabs. Even if it were possible for Soviet-Western collaboration to impose a stable settlement, the Soviets would probably believe that their influence with the Arabs would suffer, since it has been built largely on implicit support of radical Arab hostility to Israel. The more recent Soviet moves for diplomatic collaboration with the Western Powers probably reflect concern that eventually the risks could become less controllable, especially because of the increasing role of Arab terrorist organizations which the Arab States themselves cannot control. Soviet tactics evidently aim now at persuading the US to influence Israel toward moderating its claims sufficiently to permit diplomatic processes to work and some defusing of tensions to occur. But the Soviet leaders do seem to recognize that some pressure on their own clients, which could damage the USSR's standing with the Arabs, will also be needed. Perhaps awareness of the possibility of Israel's early acquisition of nuclear weapons gives the Soviets an added incentive to try to move the Arabs toward a reduction of tensions.

38. If a general settlement could be achieved, the Soviets would expect to gain certain advantages. Opening of the Suez Canal would shorten their shipping route to Asia and would facilitate Soviet maritime operations in the Indian Ocean. Their part in bringing about a settlement might constitute implicit acceptance by the Western Powers of their right to a decisive voice in the affairs of the area. But to achieve a general settlement, the Soviets would have to bring such great pressure to bear on the Arabs to make concessions that they would risk losing the position of influence they have won. This they are very unlikely to do. That is why their present diplomatic activity is probably undertaken only with a view to containing the risks in the present situation rather than in any expectation of actually bringing about a lasting settlement.

39. If violence mounts further and formal hostilities resume, the Soviets will face harder choices. They might then be drawn into assisting the defense of the Arab States; this could happen because Soviet ships and aircraft are present intermittently at UAR bases and large numbers of Soviet advisors serve with Egyptian combat units. But the Soviets would not want to run the political and military risks of joining in attacks on Israel itself or actually threatening its survival. While they may not rate the likelihood of a direct involvement with the US as very great at present, it does not appear that what is at stake for

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them in the area would justify risks of this magnitude. At that stage, they would probably move further toward tacit collaboration with the US to contain the situation.

*Asia*

40. The Soviets have pursued a variety of aims in the arc from Japan to the Indian subcontinent, though it is not clear that they have operated on the basis of any grand strategic conception for the area. They have sought, as elsewhere, to move into the vacuum left by the end of Western colonialism, using trade, the supply of arms, and their "anti-imperialist" credentials as principal instruments of influence. They have given priority to efforts to deny use of the area to US military power. They have tried to maintain their leadership of the Communist parties there and to guide them in ways compatible with Soviet foreign policy interests. And increasingly over the last several years, their policy has been geared to the containment of China as an ideological and great power competitor.

41. Soviet political and material support to North Vietnam since 1965 has also been intended to serve these aims of policy. The Soviet leaders have wanted to see a setback for US power in Vietnam which would limit the future US role in Asia. But they also wanted this to be achieved by tactics which would limit political and military risks to themselves and maximize their own rather than Chinese credit for the success. Thus, though they have had only modest leverage in Hanoi, they have evidently used it, not toward ending the war, but to influence the Vietnamese to rely more on the political element in their mix of political-military tactics. The Soviets brought propaganda and diplomatic pressure to bear on the US in order to promote negotiations under conditions Hanoi would accept. Now that negotiations are in train, the USSR will want to help them succeed, but not in ways which would prejudice its future relations with Hanoi. If the North Vietnamese accede to a settlement short of their original aims, however, the Soviets will not stand in the way and will adapt their policy accordingly.

42. The Vietnamese episode illustrates the basically competitive nature of the Soviet-American relationship in Asia. Where circumstances require, as in India, they will permit some tacit parallelism to operate, but they will not convert it into active collaboration. In Southeast Asia, they appear to be positioning themselves for continued competition whatever the outcome in Vietnam; they are unlikely to participate in the efforts for regional organization and development which the US has in view. Their attitudes on the Indonesian debt case and on the Asian Development Bank show their preference for unilateralism over cooperation. In Korea, they do not now encourage the North to adopt an adventurous course, but neither are they willing to pay any political price to restrain the North Koreans. As the Soviets see it, cooperation with the US in Asia would compromise their own aims; they will entertain moves in that direction only when it seems necessary to contain major risks to their security and interests.

43. If Chinese power becomes more menacing, this might provide the occasion for a change in this general Soviet stance in Asia. The Soviets probably do not

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anticipate a major threat to themselves in the near term, and may still have some slight hope for the revival of "healthy" forces in Chinese communism. But Moscow is clearly concerned for the longer future. The Soviet leaders have given signs, moreover, that they fear not only the growth of Chinese military power but the possibility of an eventual rapprochement between China and the US. This they would see as a major and unfavorable shift in the relation of forces which they should do all they could to prevent. In the long run, therefore, events may compel fundamental revisions of Soviet policy. The Chinese factor seems more calculated to bring this about than any other.

#### *Arms Control*

44. The Soviet leaders have reasons at this time, perhaps more than ever before, to entertain a serious approach to arms control. As indicated in earlier paragraphs, the burdens of the arms race have been substantial in recent years, and a change in priorities would contribute in some degree to forestalling economic and social strains which otherwise are likely to become more serious, and in time, perhaps even critical. In the field of strategic nuclear weapons their buildup over the last several years has given the Soviets a better relative position than they have ever had. Even apart from the added economic pressures they would face, the Soviets may not be confident that as the US moves to more advanced systems, they will be able to maintain the pace technologically. They could think that stabilization in the near future would give them more security than they are otherwise likely to have. They might also reason that, to support the kind of competitive foreign policy they are pursuing in distant areas, greater emphasis on appropriate conventional forces would serve them better than additional strategic nuclear strength.

45. However persuasive such considerations might be to some elements of the regime, the reasons which others will find to oppose a genuine effort to obtain a strategic arms limitation agreement will also carry great weight. Grounds for mistrust of US intentions, fear of ideological compromise or penetration, concern about misunderstanding on the part of allies and clients will all be urged. The influence of the military establishment will generally work against a positive approach, though some elements might, in the interest of other force components, welcome a halt to the strategic weapons buildup. Given the climate of opinion ordinarily surrounding so highly charged an issue, the chances of a positive approach emerging would not be great, were it not for the serious dilemmas which prolongation of the arms race would invoke.

46. What signs there are indicate that the policy-bureaucratic struggle over this issue was not resolved by the decision to begin strategic arms talks with the US, but in fact seems to be continuing. It is likely that that decision was agreed to on the basis that the Soviet approach would be exploratory, and that even if no agreement was reached, some US decisions might be slowed down and time gained. The fact that the move was opposed earlier, however, suggests that some people in Moscow believe that, once the talks get started, they may acquire

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a momentum of their own which would propel the USSR into an unsound agreement.

47. Given the complexity of the issues, of course, the actual Soviet position will be precipitated, like that of the US, only in the process of negotiation. As usual, and perhaps more so because of disagreement in Moscow, the Soviets will leave the initiative for developing concrete proposals largely to the US. They will expect the negotiations to be prolonged, and will try to make them so if there are signs of domestic political pressures on the US side to postpone arms decisions or to make greater concessions to Soviet views. They will insist on an agreement which, whatever its actual content, registers at least implicitly their right to equality in strategic power. Acknowledgement of this is, in fact, one of the principal political gains they would expect to get out of the talks.

#### PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE IN THE USSR

48. The Soviet system described in this paper is one which, in view of its situation at home and abroad, might be judged to be ripe for change. But it is also a system within which resistance to change is very strong. Even though the totalitarian Party regime is in many ways poorly suited to managing the complex industrial society which the USSR has become, it retains great tenacity and vigor in defending its monopoly of power. Its conservative instincts and fear of adaptive change are acute.

49. Nobody can foresee what will finally happen to a system as rigid as this as it comes under the increasing pressures generated by the further development and modernization of the society. The ruling group might succeed for a long time in simply containing such pressures, even at the price of some stagnation. Some Western observers assume that there will be change of a gradualist and relatively benign sort, because the holders of power will consent by a series of pragmatic steps to a diffusion of power to groups and institutions other than the Party. Others believe that, against the background of Russian political experience and the Party's own history, it is more plausible to expect that change in the system can come only under conditions of severe political instability and disorder, perhaps even accompanied by violence in one degree or another. In any case, the USSR's future role as a world power, and the degree of uncertainty and danger its policies cause, will be greatly affected by what happens to the internal system in the years ahead.

50. With the wider involvement of Soviet policy in many parts of the world where it was not active until recently, external forces may come to play a larger role in generating pressures for change inside the USSR. A more realistic view of the forces at work in other societies might replace the doctrinaire conceptions which have governed Soviet thinking. Further major setbacks to the USSR's position in Eastern Europe or developments affecting Chinese power and policy, especially if these involved a change in China's relations with the US, might compel radical shifts in Soviet policy which would have serious repercussions on the internal system. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine successes

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which Soviet power might have externally which would have any more than temporary effect in easing internal strains.

51. Without significant change in the nature of the internal system, the external policies which are so largely determined by it will not alter much either. There may be a further diminution of the ideological input to foreign policy in favor of greater concentration on the USSR's great power interests, but this would not decrease competitiveness and hostility toward the US and might even increase them. And the US will continue to have very limited means for influencing these attitudes directly. Short of unexpected early change in the Soviet system, therefore, the outlook is for basic hostility and chronic tensions in Soviet-American relations for a considerable period. As in the past, such tensions will rise and fall depending on events, but more frequently than in the past, these may be events in one area or another over which neither side has much control.

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